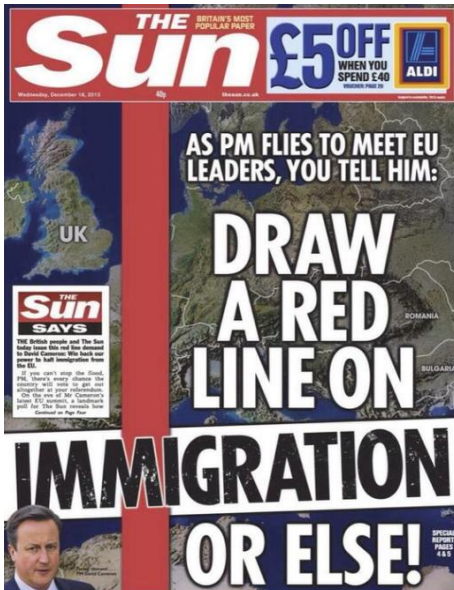


By Ian Fitzgerald and Rafał Smoczyński

The UK: A warm and friendly welcome?

The UK can be warm and welcoming to new immigrants and for many years government policy concerned itself with creating a multi-racial society. However, there is now a less open approach to immigration.



This less open approach is based on rumour and misleading information and the hard facts are often not detailed. For example recent work¹ has calculated that British residents were more likely than immigrants to receive state benefits or tax credits and this was the same for social housing. In fact the same research by these highly respected economists noted that in the period 1995 – 2011 immigrants from Europe contributed relatively 10% more than British residents to our public purse. Interestingly between 2001 and 2011 immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) contributed a net £5 billion to the public purse. This does not of course take into account that many CEE immigrants, including Poles, also contribute their educational qualifications, as these have not been paid for by the UK but by the country of origin.

However, instead of applauding this enterprise and seeking to diminish rumour and misleading information politicians have increasingly legitimised anti-immigrant discussion. Overall, our politicians and news media are now much more likely to highlight negative rather than positive immigration stories.

Rumour and misleading information leads not only to a lack of trust and resentment between communities but also to open public shows of xenophobia and the rise of ‘legitimate’ anti-immigrant political parties and government policies. The following provides details of what this has meant for a number of recently resident northern Polish workers. The research that supports this account was jointly conducted by the Polish Academy of Sciences and Northumbria University in 2012/2013. Data was collected through a web-based questionnaire (qu) that had 125 responses from those in the north, followed by 46 semi-structured northern interviews (in).

Context

Working lives of Polish newcomers to the North East: To begin with it is important to provide some context, 77 (62%) of our questionnaire respondents stated that their economic situation was ‘good’ or ‘correct’. People in interviews echoed these views with several respondents noting that they had mortgages and intended to stay. Significantly, though, 37 (30%) of our questionnaire respondents and one interviewee stated that they had experienced various forms of work-based exploitation. Comments ranged from ‘forced labour extorted by the employer...’ (qu.12) ‘...forcing overtime working, ...cheating on the number of hours detailed on my payslip’ (qu.49) through ‘treating people with contempt, they fire almost without notice’ (qu.20) and ‘British employees are paid when they work on leave days but we Poles are not...’ (qu.28) to ‘failure to pay wages owed’ (qu.10) and ‘poor working conditions’ (qu.47). It is also important to highlight that the often noted hard working and diligent Pole was seen by some employers as a hallmark to expect more for less: ‘...in pubs and hotels I feel that employers expect me to work hard and show more commitment than British people do. I am seen as the “hard working Pole” and have to carry heavy bags and I am given more work quotas. I believe the formal equal rights for European citizens does not apply to many Poles....’ (in.9). As you will know this type of treatment is not new, although it has improved, but what is concerning is that of those who noted being exploited the majority felt that their

¹ Dustmann, C. and Frattini, T. (2014) “The Fiscal Effects of Immigration to the UK”, *The Economic Journal* 124: F593-F643; there is also other work that has looked at this IPPR (2005) *Paying their way: The fiscal contribution of immigrants in the UK*, IPPR paper April 2005.

economic situation was good (23 of 37). This may signify a trade-off between poor employment prospects for a better economic situation in the UK. So what were the wider society and community experiences of our respondents?

Isolation, xenophobia and ignorance

Current integration into resident and Polish communities: An important part of living in a country and locality is how much people feel part of their environment and more importantly how already resident local populations welcome people. Significantly, under a half of our questionnaire respondents felt integrated into British society (53 of 125) and this was echoed in interviews with people noting isolation. However, there were even less questionnaire respondents who felt integrated into the resident Polish community (39 of 125). For example Poles from Newcastle in particular stated that ‘...*there is little opportunity for integration*’ (qu.1) and ‘...*I have not managed to make contact with the local migrant community*’ (qu.30) as well as ‘...*sure we have our close circle of friends and tend to remain so. I have had many disappointing situations with fellow Poles, people do not know each other and seemingly want to scratch your eyes*’ (qu.17). This was readily expressed in the interviews with some emphasising the so-called ‘uncivilised’ nature of certain Poles who have migrated from Polish villages rather than towns and cities.

Xenophobia and ignorance: So how welcoming were the resident Northern community to our respondents? Well in both the questionnaire and in interviews people noted ‘*having English friends*’ and detailed that they felt a part of the local community. For example in:

Leeds ‘*I think I am integrated with British society, I have a good command of English, have English friends, and I attend local cultural events*’ (qu.109);

Leeds ‘*I am the only Pole in the company and nobody is hostile towards me. On the contrary everybody is nice and some people have even tried to learn Polish words (polite words)*’ (qu.113);

Gateshead ‘*I have good relations with many people and my neighbours*’ (qu.123);

Newcastle ‘*Yes, I feel integrated into British society, because generally they are fantastic people. They have a good time and are exceptional optimists like me!*’ (qu.12).

However, the majority of our questionnaire respondents had experienced some form of xenophobia (63 of the 125). Again of these the majority (38) felt that their overall economic situation was good or correct. Perhaps not surprisingly the vast majority of those who had expressed an issue with their employment had also experienced xenophobia (25 of 37). The type of xenophobic incidents ranged from:

Comments in public places:

In Bishop Auckland a respondent noted ‘...*abuse in the store and at school*’ (qu.37);

In Gateshead ‘...*I was called a f@cking Polish freak...kids shouted for me to go home... I am often asked why do you immigrants have council houses when we have none!*’ (qu.42);

In Hull ‘...*abusive words in pubs and in the street...and newspaper articles and some political opinions are biased*’ (qu.78),

‘...*some petty comments like “this is not your country go home”*’ (qu.80),

‘...*I have had verbal abuse and even spitting*’ (qu.86);

In Leeds ‘*British workers have accused me of taking their jobs*’ (qu.98),

‘...*a neighbour called me a Polish whore*’ (qu.107);

In Newcastle ‘...*during the four years of living here I have had verbal abuse...*’ (qu.20),

‘...*yes I have had this in Newcastle...*’ (qu.26),

‘...*permanent blaming for taking British jobs...*’ (qu.32);

In Salford ‘...*there are often arguments that I am taking someone’s job*’ (qu.59);

In Sunderland ‘...*kids in the streets say “go home”...*’ (qu.47),

‘...people have stuck their middle finger up at me...’ (qu.118).

Vandalism and other forms of attack:

In Barton upon Humber *‘...my car was and my house windows were damaged’ (qu.55);*

In Gateshead *‘...where I live I have had offensive graffiti on my wall’ (qu.43);*

In Hull *‘...when we arrived we had our car tyres pierced’ (qu.66),*

‘...one car had a lamp damaged and in another it was scratched’ (qu.68),

‘...on our estate the neighbours... have vandalised our property’ (qu.72);

In Newcastle *‘...a broken mirror on my car...’ (qu.4),*

‘...several times people have tried to damage our cars’ (qu.17),

‘...throwing eggs at our house...scratching our car, writing offensive words on the door’ (qu.22);

In Sunderland *‘...broken window in my car...’ (qu.120),*

‘I had my car scratched’ (qu.121);

In Winsford (Cheshire) *‘Frequent attacks on our estate, broken fences, broken car mirrors...we contact the police and now have a camera’ (qu.61).*

Xenophobia and discrimination at work:

‘I think I have not got promotion despite my higher qualifications and professional experience compared to British colleagues’ (qu.1),

‘...colleagues from my company have said openly that members of their family do not have jobs because the Poles took their posts’ (qu.15),

‘...on my locker was scratched lazy Polish b&sta%d’ (qu.30),

‘...permanent blaming for taking British jobs, worse treatment by employees and management team’ (qu.32),

‘...in the last company where I worked there was a women who talked about Poles being ‘lazy bit€hes and stupid... In my company now British make you feel that being a Pole means that you are worse than them’ (qu.44),

‘In my company I’ve heard offensive comments...’ (qu.46),

‘I have had incidents and these usually occur at the workplace’ (qu.82),

‘...English people have more freedom in the workplace than Poles...’ (qu.85);

Several of the questionnaires and the interviews also detailed that this xenophobia had become worse following the 2008 financial crisis:

In Newcastle *‘The situation has worsened. Six years ago the English were more open towards us, there was not this campaign that we take their jobs and benefits. Now it is like Britain for Brits not for foreigners....’ (in.1);*

‘The financial crisis has changed everything and the good old times have vanished’ (in.3),

‘The problem started in 2008 when this financial crash came. Indeed, I had eggs thrown at my windows, scratched car this type of stuff’ (in.6);

In Washington *‘The situation occurred when the crisis came and a redundancy policy was implemented in the factory. In the toilets racist graffiti appeared and there was some targeting of Poles’ (in.15).*

Final word

Employers have found the 2004 Polish migration to be of significant value for hard-to-fill vacancies as well as skilled workers. Although, there is evidence that some employers used this migration as a means of 'wage control' and indeed exploited workers. Overall, though, Poles were regarded as hard-working and government policy, as well as, much of public opinion was supportive of these new workers. However, following the failure of the financial sector and the ensuing economic crisis, the atmosphere, tenor and manner of public opinion and debate changed. Government and 'pundits' now readily support and supply the news media with issues that question the role of migrants in our economy and indeed in our country. This is compounded by reductions in public spending which mean that it is more difficult for those who are having issues with xenophobia to seek advice and support from government and other agencies. A spiral of racism is emerging where near racist policy objectives merge into a local reality where people feel more able to express xenophobic views, supported by some of the media and perhaps less likely to be challenged by the state.



Who can help?

The following provide an up-to-date list of initiatives that you can turn to if you are experiencing hate crimes such as Xenophobia or discrimination, where possible we give location of initiatives.

Hate Crime initiatives

National:

Stop Hate UK: <http://www.stophateuk.org/>

Hate Crime (True Vision): <http://report-it.org.uk/home>

Victim Support: 08 08 16 89 111 www.victimsupport.org.uk

Cleveland

Hate crime: www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk/Victim-Services/Hate-Crime-and-How-to-Report-It.aspx

Gateshead

Anti-Social Behaviour Team: 0191 433 3990

Community Safety Team: 0191 433 2701

Stop hate crime (ARCH): 0191 433 2648 (24 hours + translation service) Arch@gateshead.gov.uk

Hate Crime/Vulnerable Victims and Communities: 0191 433 2701

Victim Support: 0191 477 8395

Greater Manchester

Hate Crime: <http://www.gmvictims.org.uk/find-information/ive-been-affected-by/hate-crime>

Humberside

Hate Crime: <http://www.humberside.police.uk/issues/hate-crime>

North Yorkshire

Hate Crime in North Yorkshire and the City of York: <http://www.northyorkshire-pcc.gov.uk/hate-crime-understanding-hate-crime-in-north-yorkshire-and-the-city-of-york/>

Supporting Victims Service: <http://www.supportingvictims.org/>

Information for hate crime victims: <http://www.supportingvictims.org/types-of-crime/personal-abuse-and-hate-crime/>

Newcastle, North Tyneside, Gateshead & South Tyneside

ARCH – Newcastle, North Tyneside, Gateshead & South Tyneside

ARCH Newcastle (and national) is a reporting line for racist, homophobic and transphobic incidents. You do not need to be able to prove that an event happened in order to report it. How do I report a hate crime to ARCH?

1. Call 0800 032 32 88. This 24-hour line is FREE even to mobiles and can be linked to language line.
2. Visit <http://www.mesmacnortheast.com/health-and-safety/homophobic-incidents-reporting/>

For further information about this research and more in depth publications on it please contact either **Ian Fitzgerald** (ian.fitzgerald@northumbria.ac.uk) or **Rafał Smoczyński** (rsmoczyn@ifispan.waw.pl)